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## A VISITING NURSE'S EXPERIENCE IN THE WAR ZONE

BY ELEANOR M. ERICSON

*Chicago, Ill.*

*Heidelberg, August 2, 1914.* Yesterday morning we arose in Lucerne, anticipating, just as we have for more than a month, a delightful ride to the German border, a stop-over in Shaffhausen to see the Falls of the Rhine, and on across the fields past the Black Forest to Heidelberg. We went out into the bright sunshine of a beautiful summer morning, and were plunged into a vortex of confusion, excitement, and preparations for war. Today, our normal world seems to have been turned upside down, and we feel that it was ages ago that we were in Switzerland. Before leaving the hotel yesterday, we were unofficially advised not to attempt to enter Germany, but we did not listen to rumors. Authentic information is meager and difficult to obtain. We knew that war had been declared between Servia and Austria, that Russia had begun to mobilize, that Germany had given an ultimatum to France and Russia, and was awaiting the end of twenty-four hours for the answer.

We were surprised at the crowd in and about the station, and the difficulty we had in obtaining seats on the train. We expected to stop only at Shaffhausen, lunch there, and go on to Heidelberg, where we were due about four thirty. At Zurich we changed trains. Here we found confusion, excitement and a most motley crowd. Swiss soldiers in orderly ranks going to the border; German reservists in uniform, and in citizen's clothes, answering the call of their Kaiser; Italian and Swiss tourists coming from the north; English, French, Belgians and Dutch from Italy and Switzerland; German women and children hurrying home from holidays with reservist husbands and fathers; Americans everywhere, passing each other and bound north, south and west. The Europeans cannot understand us and are astonished that we are not more alive to the gravity of the situation. A German of probably fifty, cultured, intelligent and to all appearances a "man of affairs" explosively exclaimed once: "You Americans, you make me, what shall I say? you make me sick! It is best that you go back, go to Genoa, and sail for your own country where all is peace. Why will you go into Germany? But they will not allow you to cross the border—you will not leave Switzerland today." He went on to say that soon all Europe would be involved and that eventually the United States would be drawn into the war or would be called upon to make peace.

In due course of time we crossed the border and reached Shaffhausen, where we changed again, repeated the wild scramble for seats,

and made the third stage in a baggage car. During the day we changed four times, rode first, second and third class and in a baggage car, and arrived here at two a.m., about ten hours late. One hour was lost when our train of twenty-six cars met another of equal length. We were on a single track and the siding was not long enough to allow us to pass. We reached Singen at four o'clock, dusty, warm, tired and hungry. No words can describe the pandemonium reigning there, soldiers everywhere, in twos and threes, in scattered groups, in companies; reservists in citizen's clothes; grave, earnest, sad-faced men, older than the regulars, business men, professional men, and many, many peasants; mothers, wives and children accompanying the men as far as possible. Tired, dirty people literally fought their way to a counter to buy a sandwich or a glass of beer, perhaps to have it lost or spilled before reaching the border of the mob.

At about five-thirty we left there. The ride to Heidelberg, with another stop at Offenbach, was an unforgettable one; nine of us were crowded into a first-class compartment intended for six, as many more were in the aisle; we relieved each other by occupying the seats in turn. In the party were three reservists, one, a splendid specimen of German manhood, probably forty, was accompanied by his wife and thirteen-year-old daughter. The wife told us that they had been called home from a tour of Italy and the brave little woman was making the best of the situation, the little girl, however, was inconsolable and constantly clung to her father's hand. A young man and his bride sat on their baggage in the aisle, oblivious to all about them, the girl's arm about her soldier's neck. They were bravely alive to the knowledge that it might be for the last time; they knew and we all knew, that all over the five countries, thousands of men and women were living through the same agony. The third soldier, probably thirty, to all appearances, tuberculous, and alone, wanted so badly to talk to someone. "Ah, you Americans," he said, "it is well for you that you live in a land of peace, but what will become of my mother? She is ill and alone."

The fields and gardens of Germany were beautiful and bright, in contrast with the famous Black Forests which we passed later, beautiful, impressive and ominously dark with the low sun just above. We stopped in many villages, always to be joined by more grave, quiet men and always leaving sad-faced women. Somewhere on the way the orders for official mobilization were received.

Here in the hotel it is delightfully cool and quiet, but in the streets the people all wear an air of suppressed excitement, and across the way a crowd is always before a bulletin-board.

*Maintz, Sunday evening.* The two days we expected to spend in Heidelberg were shortened to a little more than twelve hours, by our being officially advised to move on. We can not cash checks and must manage for the present to live on what gold we have. To this end we have put all our finances together and are living on bare necessities.

This morning we obtained carriages and drove about Heidelberg, past the University buildings and out to the Castle. In the streets all is excitement, people rushing to read bulletins. One hears on every side cries of "Hoch der Kaiser;" soldiers everywhere, guarding streets, questioning strangers, and putting up wire netting about the stations and all entrances to the city. Within the castle walls, all was quiet and cool and peaceful, lifting us years and miles away from the turmoil of yesterday. The castle itself stands gray, grim and silent, and far beyond, toward the river, lay the cool green fields. But we could stay only a few minutes, and then hastened back to a quick lunch, a hurried packing of suitcases, and a wild drive to the station, there to take up again a dreary wait for a train which seems never to come. Dr. Buck, my brother-in-law, was to have met us here but we must go on without him. The train which finally came took us only to Mannheim. There, after all boarding three trains in succession and receiving the order "Alles Aus," half the party and half the luggage for the fourth time went aboard a train. While the men were looking after the baggage, the porters all seemed to have gone to war, the train moved out, leaving us on a train bound for Cologne without tickets, or money. For the first time since leaving Lucerne a collector asked for tickets, and when told our predicament, he very politely, but firmly ordered us off at Maintz. I have never seen anything so perfect as German rules and regulations, nor seen anything so confused as a German when an emergency upsets the order of things. A meal served at the regular time in a German hotel is a joy, but a luncheon served, as late as the one we ate in Singen at 4 p.m. is a grievous thing.

By the time we reached Maintz a cold rain had set in. We got off the train, joined another waiting mob, put our suitcases together, sat down on them and waited for something to happen. Not having tickets, we were denied even the privileges of a third-class waiting room. The few seats were occupied, and we should not have taken them had we had a chance, as there were tired mothers and old women also waiting. A pompous porter, too fat, I think, for war, ordered us on our feet as he didn't think "it looked well to see us sitting there." We appealed to another, who wore a few more gold bands, and were

granted the privilege of sitting on our own suitcases on a cold, rainy dirty, crowded platform. After waiting two hours, and seeing train after train pass by, loaded with soldiers, one bearing our friends and money came in, fortunately all unloading here. Had it been a through train for Cologne, no one knows what might have become of us. As it was, we decided to remain here until morning and try going tomorrow by way of boat and the Rhine.

It would be hard to imagine anything more warlike than the scene from the hotel window. Just below was a public square; beyond, the railroad station. On two sides of the square the streets were lined with vine-enclosed beer gardens. The vines were gray with tobacco smoke, glasses were constantly clicking, one heard laughter here, ringing shouts there, German war songs everywhere, occasional cries of "Hoch der Kaiser!" The square was filled with people, men, women and children, talking, laughing, crying, singing; trains were coming in continually loaded with soldiers; soldiers were marching in orderly ranks, to and from trains, always followed by a burst of applause.

Long past midnight there was no cessation in the excitement. The tramp, tramp that seems to beat upon our brains and must beat on the very hearts and lives of the women of this land, went on incessantly. It is the women, in this man's land, who suffer most.

*On the Rhine, Monday, August 3.* This morning it was quieter with an air of repressed excitement. The only thrills of the morning fell to the lot of two of the men, who were detained by guards and not being able to make their German intelligible, came to the boat under military escort. When they joined us it was hard to tell who looked the more sheepish, the Americans, or the young soldier.

Maintz was beautifully clean and fresh looking this morning, the air is clear and crisp, enabling us to see far away across the grain laden farms, the sky is intensely blue, the Rhine is not "The blue Rhine" from our mid-stream viewpoint; the beautiful "vine-clad" and terraced hills are all the poet has pictured them, the castles and towers, here and there, noticeably the famous "Cat," and "Mouse" towers—and the "Gibraltar of the Rhine" are very imposing and mediaeval looking, and all combined to make us feel that the war preparations of Saturday and yesterday are far behind us, and if it were not for the soldiers stationed at every bridge, in every village, and on the brow of every hill, we might imagine it had all been a bad dream. Now, at five o'clock, we can see the twin spires of the Cologne Cathedral; we are nearing a wonderful pontoon bridge, and are due in Cologne at six o'clock. We are looking forward to landing with rather mixed anticipations. On board the boat are two Englishmen who were captured

as spies in Bingen, held for twelve hours, all baggage and kodak films confiscated, and ordered to leave the country as soon as possible. A young woman, a Kansas school teacher, whose clothes had been torn, whose face and hands bore scratches inflicted by a mob in Maintz, was almost a nervous wreck from the six hours in a guardhouse, with five Russian suspects. She had a passport but the soldiers could not read it, and she was held awaiting someone who understood English. Once today we passed a beautiful castle-like structure, high upon the brow of a hill, above which floated outstretched, against the blue sky, our own Stars and Stripes. Nearly all the passengers on the boat were Americans and cheer after cheer was given, joined in heartily by the German crew. We were told it belongs to a Mr. Reinlander of New York.

*Nijmegen, August 4.* We found orderly throngs in Zurich; excited, expectant crowds in Slingen, Offenbach and Heidelberg; excited, noisy, demonstrative mobs in Maintz; but were here plunged into a riotous, suspicious, seething mass of men, women and children who saw in every strange face a possible spy. We went to a hotel directly across the square in front of, and facing, the cathedral, intending to spend the night, but soon decided to travel on. Here we learned that Dr. Buck had gone on, despairing of finding us. We looked out over the mob across to the cathedral, a monument of calm and quiet strength, glorified by the slanting rays of a late summer, and topped by the twin spires, rising tall and white, majestic sentinels of peace, looking down in sorrow on the war-maddened people in the darkening square below. Those of us who dared pass the mob, crossed the square as best we could, and went into the church. On every hand were cries of "Spion" and with each new cry the mob surged in another direction, sometimes carrying us with them, and we saw at least six people made captive. Some of these, we were told later, were shot; as to that we do not know. Within the church we found a different but no less harrowing scene. Men, women and children, had come here to pray for those who had gone to the front and suppressed cries and sobs could be heard from every corner. At the door, a heart-broken mother was bidding goodbye to her soldier son. When we came out the sun had set, the square was darker and more ominous looking and in fear and trembling we again threaded our way through the mob. We wondered if we should try to appear unconcerned, or apprehensive or interested, as we were being watched on every side. Each one went his own way, and our Americanism conveyed us safely through. In the rapidly gathering dusk we left the hotel dinnerless, though our ride on the Rhine had whetted our, at no time, dainty appetites, for the

station. There we joined another maddened spy-hunting mob, and fell immediately under suspicion. Once a handsome, zealous, young soldier ordered us all to the guard-house, but a pretty, German-speaking girl who was with us, succeeded in convincing him that we were inoffensive Americans, doing our best to get out of the way. It was a heart-breaking three and one-half hours which we spent waiting for a train. We saw some of the marvelous mobilization that the world is standing in wonder at, train load after train load of soldiers passed through that shed. We saw a man who was leaving for the front, accompanied until the last minute by his wife and three little children. In the long wait one slept in a go-cart; the eldest, a boy, sat on the father's knee or walked about with him, his pudgy hand tightly clasped in the father's while the tiny baby lay and fitfully slept in the mother's arms. A distraught, worried woman, struggled under a burden of two babies and two huge bags. One of the men carried her bags down the stairs for her, and on turning to look back after climbing the stairs again, found her following him. She had become so confused she did not know where she intended going. We spoke to one of the over-worked porters before our train came but were compelled to leave her there.

Another woman, almost frantic, told us that she had sent her two children to an unmarried brother in Brussels while she accompanied her husband's body to a grave near Berlin. Her brother was subject to the first call to arms in Belgium, and she had already been delayed forty-eight hours, could not get any message through and did not know where either the brother or children were. As the hours passed the crowds become more excited and restive; children were crying from hunger and weariness; with every engine that came in, the mob surged toward the tracks in a mad rush until one marveled that none were killed. No one seemed to know on which track the different trains might be expected to come in, and we transferred our baggage three times before we found the right place. A little English girl, who was traveling alone, joined us here. In this way our party continually grew. After the mad scramble, when our train finally came in, Miss K. and I found ourselves in a first-class compartment with an Englishman and his wife, a Dutch officer on his way home from service in Albania, and a third man who never explained himself. The officer explained that he had been arrested eleven times. The Englishwoman gave us each a ham sandwich, our only food from early lunch until seven this morning. By this time, a rain had set in, the atmosphere was close and heavy and at every stop the windows were ordered tightly closed.

After slowly crawling through the darkness and rain, all night, and standing, seemingly hours, at small stations, we arrived at Cleve just as the first light was coming into the eastern sky. Mr. T. went out to find a hotel while we waited at the station. Only one small carriage was available, which came back twice before we were all transferred to a habitation. Four of us went in the second relay. We drove through lanes of dripping trees and over stretches of cobbled streets and finally drew up before a dark and deserted looking house. In response to a long peal of the door bell, a man, garbed in a dress suit and carrying a shot gun came slowly down stairs and cautiously opened the door. All this time we were trying to convince the driver that he had taken us to the wrong place while visions of a guardhouse or worse loomed before us. The first, gray hours of day do not ordinarily lend a rosy hue to life, and to four worried, tired, hungry women, who had been all night in mobs and stuffy carriages, constantly under military eyes, it seemed doubly menacing. Eventually and greatly to our relief he drove away again and we landed in the proper place, where we went wearily to bed in a room that bore evidence of not having been occupied for weeks.

We reached Beek, on the border, about noon, where our belongings were inspected, the kodak films destroyed and all maps confiscated. Each was searched, even to underwear and stockings, by ignorant peasant women who could not speak English, and who could never have found a message had anyone been guilty of carrying one. We were not asked to remove either hats or shoes. We were held two hours while an officer read Miss L.'s journal. We reached here in the early afternoon. How beautifully fresh and clean everything is! We were immediately impressed by the courtesy of the people and their friendliness for, and interest in the Americans. We lunched in a pretty little combination hotel and club house, on the edge of a park, overlooking the River Meuse. Later we wandered down to the river and stood on the spot "where Claudius stood and watched the ships go by."

*Amsterdam, August 5.* We reached here about eleven last evening and learned that Dr. Buck had just left. Knowing the difficulty in cashing checks and realizing the gravity of the situation, he had left London with all the gold he could get. Ours was only one case in many, where families and friends were separated and lost. Amsterdam seems a refuge for stranded Americans and we had difficulty in finding hotel accommodations. We found time during a day spent largely in converting paper into gold, and deciding what to do, to drive about the city and to visit the gallery, where we saw many wonderful paint-



ings by Rembrandt, Van Dyck, Rubens, the Van Ecks and other Dutch artists. Their work in its cool, austere strength and virility is very different from the Italian masterpieces.

*Flushing, August 7.* We reluctantly leave Holland tomorrow morning, beautiful, peaceful, courteous Holland, her flower-fields, her picturesque wind-mills, her wonderful canals and dikes, her clean orderly cities, her art, and her interesting people. Many, many of them speak a fluent English, and we are told that when a boy or girl leaves what corresponds to our high school, he or she can speak four languages. We visited Middleburg today, a little village near Flushing, where the people adhere to the old customs and style of dress. The women wear tight-waisted, short-sleeved, and full skirted dresses, and an elaborate white starched headdress with wonderful gold ornaments. The bicycle is used extensively here, and a common sight is a woman so garbed, market basket on arm, calmly riding a bicycle. Milk is conveyed in large cans in small carts, drawn by dogs. On the windows of the stores the names of the necessities of life, and the legal prices were pasted, with a warning that anyone found charging "war prices" was liable to arrest. And how the people adore their queen, and honor their government!

*London, August 12.* London has made us feel very much as though we were at home and how one enjoys hearing his own tongue after six weeks in strange countries, one of which was torn by preparations for war! To be sure the English are also mobilizing, but how calmly they go about it! One sees soldiers everywhere, marching, marching away; no one, not even fathers, mothers or wives know whither; nurses preparing to leave; Boy Scouts everywhere, the busiest men-in-the-making in the land; almost on every street little boys and sometimes girls playing war; and one hears constantly of what the women are doing to help outfit the soldiers.

*On the St. Lawrence River, August 29.* Today for the first time since leaving Glasgow, we are allowed to feel safe. All during the voyage, our port-holes have been tightly closed and curtained, and except for the signal light, we have traveled in absolute darkness, fearing attack by German warships. We are glad to see American soil, and feel a deep sense of gratitude that ours is a country which values peace, and lives in peace, but our hearts ache for those whose homes are torn by war.